

Submission  
No 28

## INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

**Organisation:** Sentient  
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## Inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales

Submission from Sentient, The Veterinary Institute for Animal Ethics

### Introduction

Sentient is an independent Australian veterinary association dedicated to animal welfare advocacy based on the ethical implications of animal sentience and the findings of animal welfare science. Our members are represented in academia, private practice (companion, equine and large animals), non-government, government and industry settings, with expertise in many fields including animal welfare, animal behaviour, clinical medicine, zoo and wildlife medicine, epidemiology and the use of animals in teaching and research. A number are qualified specialists in particular disciplines or have extensive experience within industries such as live export, horse racing and greyhound racing. Sentient has presented at international and national conferences, published papers, contributed numerous submissions to state and federal government inquiries, and provided evidence at parliamentary public hearings. We also host final year veterinary science students for Public, Industry and Community placements in animal welfare advocacy. Sentient is registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.

### General comments

Sentient commends the Animal Welfare Committee for establishing this inquiry into the management of cat populations in New South Wales. We are concerned that current management practices of domestic cats are ineffective and believe it is essential to adopt new approaches based on recent research evidence. The traditional approach of relying on owner education about best practice in cat management, and the more recent approach of attempting to mandate cat containment, has not reduced the annual 'kitten season' or the high numbers of cats who are euthanased every year. These situations are overwhelming the capacity of pounds and shelters and reducing the morale and mental health of their staff. Systemic changes are needed to improve the welfare of domestic cats, prevent unnecessary killing and protect the wellbeing of shelter staff, veterinarians and animal management officers.

Likewise, systemic changes are needed to improve the management of feral cats to ensure this is humane and that clear definitions are used to distinguish feral cats from domestic cats, as separate management strategies are necessary. Consistency in definitions is required for consistency in management, research and legislation. Of crucial importance, domestic cats are at risk of unnecessary killing due to the current inadequate definition used in the revised Feral Cat Threat Abatement Plan (TAP)<sup>1</sup> of 'feral' or 'pet'. Sentient strongly opposes this definition as it is confusing and fails to recognize the human associations with unowned/semi-owned domestic cats

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/threatened/publications/tap/threat-abatement-plan-feral-cats>

and the vastly different stakeholder groups involved or concerned with their management. Nor does it recognise relevant research that has been published in this space, providing evidence that the management of domestic cats requires a completely different approach to the management of feral cats.

We advocate the use in all jurisdictions of the following four cat categories, consistent with the AVA Policy Management of cats in Australia (ava.com.au)<sup>2</sup> and as described in 2018 RSPCA Report - Identifying Best Practice Domestic Cat Management in Australia<sup>3</sup>:

Feral cats	These cats are unowned, unsocialised, have no relationship with or dependence on humans and reproduce in the wild.
Owned	These cats are identified with and cared for by a specific person and are directly dependant on humans. They are usually sociable although sociability varies.
Semi-owned	These cats are fed or provided with other care by people who do not consider they own them. They are of varying sociability, with many socialised to humans, and may be associated with one or more households.
Unowned	These cats are indirectly dependant on humans with some having casual and temporary interactions with humans. They are of varying sociability, including some who are unsocialised to humans, and may live in groups.

We also note that with the announcement of the revised TAP being available for public consultation, language was used which demonises cats including: “declaring war” and “walking, stalking ruthless killers”. All cats are sentient beings and one of the TAP’s key principles (Principle 3) is that: “programs to reduce cat impacts should use actions that are justified by optimising biodiversity outcomes, overall humaneness, and the sustainability of the action(s).” In this context, the use of pejorative language in relation to cats is not constructive and leads to further division between cat owners and non-cat owners. Even worse, it potentially incites cruelty being inflicted on cats.

## Terms of reference

### **(a) the impact of cats on threatened native animals in metropolitan and regional settings**

Sentient acknowledges the need to prevent and/or reduce negative impacts on our native species, especially those who are most vulnerable – this includes from land clearing, over development and climate change as well as from species labelled as ‘pests’ such as feral cats, and indeed, also from

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ava.com.au/policy-advocacy/policies/companion-animals-management-and-welfare/management-of-cats-in-australia/>

<sup>3</sup> RSPCA, May 2018. Identifying best practice cat management in Australia. <https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Findings-and-Recommendations-Identifying-Best-Practice-Domestic-Cat-Management.pdf>

domestic cats. To determine the impact of cats on threatened native animals, it is essential that studies are designed with the purpose of determining the proportion of cats who predate. It is concerning that many of the conclusions drawn about the impact of cats on wildlife are based on outdated studies that were designed to determine the relative proportion of prey and the number caught by domestic cats who are known to predate, which may lead to an overestimation of their impact. The Australian Pet Welfare Association, in their response to the Draft Threat Abatement Plan for predation of wildlife by feral cats, noted that regarding owned and stray cats, “population studies from urban areas of Australia have not been able to document a population effect on birds or mammals.”<sup>4</sup>

Further research is needed to establish the impact of domestic cats on wildlife. We do know that free-roaming domestic cats are active at night at the same time as native animals in protected areas where cats are prohibited. A recent study used camera traps over a five-week period in a protected area on North Head, Manly, including within the Sydney Harbour National Park and North Head Sanctuary, which is home to the Long-nosed Bandicoot and the only mainland breeding colony of Little Penguin in NSW.<sup>5</sup> The footage showed that cats (who were assumed to be owned due to wearing collars or being of an identified breed) were detected in this area at night, overlapping with Long-nosed Bandicoots, possums and other small mammals, raising concerns for potential predation. A study of free-roaming domestic cats in New Zealand<sup>6</sup> who were monitored by cat-borne video cameras for 3 days found that 62% of cats engaged in 121 predation events (40 of which resulted in capture of prey), and that 87% involved insects and 13% involved skinks, with no capturing of mammals, birds or amphibians. This is the kind of study that should be conducted on a larger scale in Australia, using camera surveillance and other monitoring techniques to develop an accurate estimate of the impact of domestic cats on threatened native animals in metropolitan and regional settings, particularly in peri-urban areas with high ecological value. Although some figures have been reported based on extrapolations<sup>7</sup>, more robust field assessment is required. Sentient is not aware of any extinctions directly attributed to domestic cats.

### **(b) the effectiveness of cat containment policies including potential barriers**

Sentient does not support mandatory cat containment but advocates that owners are encouraged and supported to contain their cat(s). There is no evidence that mandatory containment of cats is successful in reducing any of the metrics of concern, such as intakes to shelters, euthanasia of healthy cats and kittens or nuisance complaints to councils. We are not aware of any outcomes data on the effectiveness of cat containment policies such as those found in the ACT, Victoria and

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<sup>4</sup> <https://petwelfare.org.au/response-to-draft-tap/>

<sup>5</sup> Kennedy, B.P.A.; Clemann, A.; Ma, G.C. Feline Encounters Down Under: Investigating the Activity of Cats and Native Wildlife at Sydney’s North Head. *Animals* 2024, 14, 2485. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani14172485>

<sup>6</sup> Bruce SJ, Zito S, Gates MC, Aguilar G, Walker JK, Goldwater N and Dale A (2019) Predation and Risk Behaviors of Free-Roaming Owned Cats in Auckland, New Zealand via the Use of Animal-Borne Cameras. *Front. Vet. Sci.* 6:205. doi: 10.3389/fvets.2019.00205

<sup>7</sup> Legge S, Woisanski J, Dickman C et al (2020) We need to worry about Bella and Charlie: the impacts of pet cats on Australian wildlife. *Wildlife Research* <https://doi.org/10.1071/WR19174>

Tasmania, which require owners to keep their cats contained for a specified period in specific areas (known as cat curfews), including at all times in the ACT. Despite this, mandatory containment policies are being increasingly adopted, and there is now even a move in some areas to designate cat-free suburbs.<sup>8</sup> This is not driven by any evidence-base but instead, by a growing social prejudice against cats which only stands to deprive individuals living in certain areas of enjoying the benefits of a companion animal and to reduce the adoption rate of cats and kittens needing homes.

A potential barrier to mandatory cat containment is that some cats are more difficult to contain than others and may escape from even well-constructed containment enclosures. There is also a socioeconomic barrier for many owners to containing their cats as containment depends upon secure fencing, doors and windows and/or a cat enclosure, all of which can be expensive. Approximately one in three Australians lives in a rental property, and so may not have landlord approval to make alterations to the dwelling they live in.

This policy also fails to recognise that the majority of cat owners are already containing their animals. A survey of 4482 cat owners throughout NSW, with over two thirds living in major urban centres, found that 65% kept their cat fully contained for 24 hours within their property. The most important determining factor in whether owners kept their cats contained was having the skills, knowledge and belief that they could do so. Owners who lived in apartments or were renting were more likely to contain their cats. This study did not, however, collect data on owner socioeconomic status.<sup>9</sup>

One of the main flaws of mandatory cat containment policies is their failure to address semi-owned and unowned cats, who require special programs and resources. Semi-owners of cats, or even those who consider themselves as owners but do not contain their cats, may simply claim that the cat is not theirs when confronted by council officers. Australian research has identified that semi-owners of cats are disproportionately from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and can face multiple barriers (such as cost and lack of trust in authorities) to claiming ownership of the cats they care for and to having them desexed.<sup>10</sup>

Other potential negative outcomes of these policies are:

- increasing the risk of cats being abandoned or relinquished, which has implications for local councils

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-02-16/councils-push-for-stronger-laws-to-keep-pet-cats-inside/101968794>

<sup>9</sup> Ma GC, McLeod LJ. Understanding the Factors Influencing Cat Containment: Identifying Opportunities for Behaviour Change. *Animals*. 2023; 13(10):1630. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani13101630>

<sup>10</sup> Ma GC, McLeod LJ, Zito SJ. Characteristics of cat semi-owners. *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery*. 2023;25(9). doi:10.1177/1098612X231194225

- deterring potential adopters
- reducing the welfare of cats if they are contained without being provided with the enrichment they require
- inciting hatred of cats and cruelty towards cats who are not contained, and
- the risk of people setting cat traps, which may be encouraged by councils

Sentient promotes public education and programs to support owners to keep their cats contained, rather than blanket mandatory policies that fail to recognise socioeconomic and other barriers to cat containment. We also support community cat programs targeted to semi-owned cats. By providing free desexing, microchipping and preventative health care, many semi-owners of cats take formal ownership and can be supported to gradually contain their cats as the cats become less timid, such as by night-time feeding after the cats have come indoors.

### **(c) welfare outcomes for cats under contained conditions**

There are substantial welfare benefits for cats who are contained within their properties. These include protection from contracting infectious diseases (such as feline immunodeficiency virus and feline leukaemia) being hit by cars, dog attacks, cat fights that can cause serious injuries and abscesses, human cruelty, becoming trapped (such as in drain ways), ingesting toxins, being stolen or being seized by animal management officers. Young cats who are not yet desexed are also at risk of reproducing, increasing the existing burden of excess unwanted kittens. The RSPCA has warned, however, that cat containment can have negative impacts if cats are not provided with the enrichment they require. This can lead to health risks including obesity, immobility, feline type 2 diabetes mellitus, lower urinary tract disease and behavioural problems, which may be a risk factor for owners relinquishing their cats in some cases.<sup>11</sup>

### **(d) the effectiveness of community education programs and responsible pet ownership initiatives**

This is an area that is lacking. We are not aware of any studies that evaluate the efficacy of community education programs or responsible pet ownership initiatives targeting the owners of domestic cats. For such community programs to be effective it is essential to conduct research to establish who the key target audience is and to understand the drivers and barriers to responsible pet ownership. There is evidence from an Australian study of 521 cat owners that their motivation to contain their cats was increased by both messages about wildlife protection and benefits to their cat's welfare.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> RSPCA, May 2018. Identifying best practice cat management in Australia. <https://kb.rspca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Findings-and-Recommendations-Identifying-Best-Practice-Domestic-Cat-Management.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> L.J. McLeod et al, Assessing the impact of different persuasive messages on the intentions and behaviour of cat owners: A randomised control trial. *Preventive Veterinary Medicine* 146 (2017) 136–142. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.prevetmed.2017.08.005>

## **(e) implications for local councils in implementing and enforcing cat containment policies**

Mandatory cat containment policies put pressure on local councils to trap and catch stray domestic cats, particularly in response to nuisance complaints by the public. Apart from the huge costs to councils, this inevitably leads to most of these cats and kittens being unclaimed and euthanased, despite being healthy and rehomeable. Rather than mandatory cat containment, Sentient supports low-cost, targeted programs that provide free desexing, microchipping and registration to owners and semi-owners of cats in low socioeconomic areas. Such a program conducted in Melbourne resulted in stray cats becoming owned by the people who fed them, and over 8 years there was a 66% decrease in impoundments, an 82% decrease in euthanasia and a 36% decrease in cat-related complaints.<sup>13</sup>

## **(f) the effectiveness and benefits to implementing large scale cat desexing programs**

Mandatory desexing has not been successful, which may relate to the cost of the procedure. The three states with the highest cat intakes to shelters (South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania) have mandatory desexing.<sup>14</sup> There is also evidence from research in the US that annual family income is the strongest predictor of whether household cats are desexed.<sup>15</sup>

Targeted, high-intensity cat desexing programs, however, significantly reduce the number of cats and kittens presented to pounds and shelters (i.e., intakes) and the number of healthy cats and kittens who are euthanased in these settings. A recently published study on outcomes from a Community Cat Program conducted between 2020 and 2023 in a small regional town in Queensland with few vets and no access to low-cost desexing<sup>16</sup> reported rapid effectiveness over the three-year period. This study involved free desexing, microchipping, and preventative veterinary care for all owned, semi-owned, and unowned cats in Ipswich, an area with high numbers of cat impoundments. This produced a 60% decrease in cat intakes, an 85% decrease in

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<sup>13</sup> Cotterell JL, Rand J, Barnes TS, Scotney R. Impact of a Local Government Funded Free Cat Sterilization Program for Owned and Semi-Owned Cats. *Animals*. 2024; 14(11):1615. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani14111615>

<sup>14</sup> Chua, D.; Rand, J.; Morton, J. Stray and Owner-Relinquished Cats in Australia—Estimation of Numbers Entering Municipal Pounds, Shelters and Rescue Groups and Their Outcomes. *Animals* **2023**, *13*, 1771. <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/13/11/1771>

<sup>15</sup> Chu, K.; Anderson, W.M.; Rieser, M.Y. Population Characteristics and Neuter Status of Cats Living in Households in the United States. *J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc.* **2009**, *234*, 1023–1030. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2460/javma.234.8.1023>

<sup>16</sup> Rand J, M. Saraswathy A, Verrinder J, Paterson MBA. Outcomes of a Community Cat Program Based on Sterilization of Owned, Semi-Owned and Unowned Cats in a Small Rural Town. *Animals*. 2024; 14(21):3058. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani14213058>

euthanasia and a 39% decrease in cat-related complaints to the local council. Of interest, all semi owners of 1-2 cats took full ownership at time of desexing.

The authors took a One Welfare approach and addressed the positive impact on the morale of staff, who would otherwise be burdened by the impact of killing healthy cats. They also highlighted the need for legislative change to support these programs, such as by repealing mandated containment, registration, sterilisation and limitations on cat numbers, allowing cats to be desexed and returned (with ear tags and microchip) to semi-owners based on the premise that someone is feeding them, and also occasionally to businesses and organisations (such as factories or farms) where staff were acting as semi-owners; for example, dairy farms, where cats are fed by staff and act as ‘working cats’ by keeping rodent numbers down.

### **(g) the impact of potential cat containment measures on the pound system**

Sentient is unable to report on any evidence that cat containment measures have benefited the pound system. We submit that, without support for community cat programs, the pound and shelter systems will continue to be overwhelmed by huge intakes of cats and kittens, and the continuing impact on staff of killing health animals, most of whom are young (under 6 months of age), healthy and stray. This leaves the system operating above capacity, which risks staff retention and best practice care for the animals who are impounded.

### **(h) the outcomes of similar policies on cat containment in other Australian states or territories**

Refer to section (b).

### **(i) options for reducing the feral cat population**

Traditionally, lethal methods have been employed for managing feral animal species including feral cats, who are killed by trapping and shooting, or by poisoning with 1080 baits. These methods have failed to achieve widespread population control and are also responsible for pain and suffering. There is clearly a need for more targeted and humane alternatives, and yet the TAP remains reliant on toxins as a solution.

Sentient is concerned about the support for obtaining national registration for Eradicat<sup>®</sup>, which contains 1080. Efforts should be directed to eliminate the use of 1080, not make it more available, especially in the eastern states where native species are not tolerant. We do not condone the use of 1080 or any product containing 1080 due to the unacceptable animal welfare impacts on animals, which is why RSPCA Australia does not consider 1080 as a humane method of pest animal control.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the TAP’s broad definition of ‘feral’, which includes unowned and semi-owned cats, now places these cats, who are really domestic cats, at risk of poisoning and death

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<sup>17</sup> <https://kb.rspca.org.au/knowledge-base/what-is-the-rspcas-view-on-using-1080-for-pest-animal-control/>



from 1080 ingestion. The RSPCA has expressed this as their most serious concern about the draft TAP.<sup>18</sup>

Sentient also opposes the promotion and potential increased use of leghold traps. Studies have shown that animals (target and native) have suffered significant swelling at the compression site<sup>19</sup>. The contemporary model of animal welfare, The Five Domains Model, bases an animal's overall welfare status on their mental state. We advocate that leg hold trapping must not be promoted on the basis that there is insufficient evidence which shows that mental impacts are negligible. Giving animals the benefit of the doubt, we are confident in surmising that any animal who is caught by a leghold trap would experience extremely negative welfare, including pain and distress.

Suggestions for alternative ways of killing feral cats have included the following, which Sentient opposes on humaneness grounds:

- Carbon monoxide poisoning in closed chambers, which is used in the euthanasia of laboratory animals due to a rapid loss consciousness and death with little or no distress. This requires close attention to establishing the correct concentration in the chamber before introducing animals. We are concerned that there will be little motivation to take such precautions with feral cats. Furthermore, we would not recommend carbon monoxide on the grounds of human safety, as it is extremely noxious to humans but cannot be detected through the sense of smell.<sup>20</sup>
- Disease-causing agents, which can result in unacceptable suffering. Biological methods of control also have a poor history in terms of specificity to the target, the potential for resistance to develop and lack of acceptance by the public.
- The use of bounty systems, which are not deemed to be effective, are liable to fraud and can result in negative animal welfare outcomes. These and other aspects which highlight the problems with bounty systems are described in the PestSMART toolkit on fox bounties.<sup>21</sup>
- Indigenous hunting techniques, which to our knowledge have not been subjected to scrutiny in terms of humaneness. The use of hunting dogs, flushing cats out with fire and clubbing them to death with sticks should not be permitted.

We also object to Objective 9 in the TAP, which is “to reduce density of free-roaming cats around areas of human habitation and infrastructure”. Sentient advocates that this section be removed from the TAP and transferred to a national domestic cat action plan. Management of semi-owned and unowned cats is a complex and challenging area and must be evidence- based in terms of

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.rspca.org.au/latest-news/blog/feral-cats-and-cat-management-what-you-need-to-know/>

<sup>19</sup> McGregor HW, Hampton JO, Lisle D, Legge S (2016) Live-capture of feral cats using tracking dogs and darting, with comparisons to leg-hold trapping. *Wildlife Research*, 43, 313-322.

<sup>20</sup> <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1258/002367796780739871>

<sup>21</sup> <https://pestsmart.org.au/toolkit-resource/fox-bounties/>

understanding the human connections associated with these cats. In the past, trap and kill programs have been used unsuccessfully<sup>22</sup> and these result in a huge toll on the mental health of those involved in these programs<sup>23, 24</sup>.

There is no evidence that currently available technologies can produce widespread control or eradication of feral cats and in fact, they may even increase the cat populations in the area they are delivered.<sup>25</sup> New approaches are required that are both effective and humane. Sentient supports the Australian Veterinary Association's guidelines for the management of cats in Australia,<sup>26</sup> which for feral cats, include the use of humane, non-lethal control methods (such as enclosures) where possible, lethal methods to be humane and targeted to specific feral cat populations posing a risk to wildlife (with ownership status of cats trapped near homes to be determined first) and research and development of new methods, including "non-lethal management techniques which improve the environment for wildlife, making it more supportive of wildlife breeding success and reducing predation success of cats."

In their submission to the Draft updated threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats<sup>27</sup> the AVA references ongoing work being undertaken to assess novel non-lethal options. These include improving fire management<sup>28</sup>, supporting the resilience of native species to cat predation by protecting and enhancing the structural complexity of the habitat<sup>29</sup> and training to improve anti-predator responses during re-introduction programs.<sup>30,31</sup> The lack of research into humane and potentially effective non-lethal control methods is concerning, but Sentient promotes research into the strategies discussed by the AVA, and we further suggest research trials into the use of guardian dogs to repel feral cats, providing this poses no welfare concerns for the dogs, and into fertility control, which would involve trapping, vaccinating and releasing.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Lazenby BT, Mooney NJ, Dickman CR (2015) Effects of low-level culling of feral cats in open populations: a case study from the forests of southern Tasmania. *Wildlife Research*, 41, 407-420.

<sup>23</sup> Rohlf V & Bennett P (2005) Perpetration-induced traumatic stress in persons who euthanize nonhuman animals in surgeries, animal shelters, and laboratories. *Society of Animals*, 13, 201-219.

<sup>24</sup> Scotney RA, McLaughlin D, Keates H (2015) A systematic review of the effects of euthanasia and occupational stress in personnel working with animals in animal shelters, veterinary clinics, and biomedical research facilities. *J Am Vet Med Assoc*, 247:1121-11230.

<sup>25</sup> Lazenby BT, Mooney NJ, Dickman CR (2014) Effects of low-level culling of feral cats in open populations: A case study from the forests of southern Tasmania. *Wildlife Research*. 41:407-420.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.ava.com.au/policy-advocacy/policies/companion-animals-management-and-welfare/management-of-cats-in-australia/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.ava.com.au/siteassets/policy-and-advocacy/2023-12-07-ava-submission---feral-cat-threat-abatement-plan-submitted-7-dec-2023.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> Doherty T, Dickman C, Johnson C, et al (2017) Impacts and management of feral cats *Felis catus* in Australia. *Mammal Review*, 47:83-97.

<sup>29</sup> Stobo-Wilson et al (2020) Habitat structural complexity explains patterns of feral cat and dingo occurrence in monsoonal Australia. *Biodiversity Research*. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ddi.13065>

<sup>30</sup> Moseby K, Cameron A, Crisp H (2012) Can predator avoidance training improve reintroduction for the greater bilby in arid Australia? *Animal Behaviour*, 83:1011-1021.

<sup>31</sup> West R, Letnic M, Blumstein D, et al (2018) Predator exposure improves anti-predator responses in a threatened mammal. *Journal of Applied Biology*, 55:147-156.

<sup>32</sup> J Levy et al. Long-term fertility control in female cats with GonaCon™, a GnRH immunocontraceptive. *Theriogenology* Volume 76, Issue 8, November 2011, pp. 1517-1525. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.theriogenology.2011.06.022>

The problem of predation of native wildlife by feral cats will require a combined approach using a number of strategies, but we advocate a shift away from the focus on killing. Regarding lethal methods, PestSMART's Feral cat control methods humaneness matrix<sup>33</sup> rates ground shooting in the head as the most humane in terms of both welfare impact prior to death and mode of death. Felixer grooming traps are being trialled and are more target specific to feral cats as opposed to wildlife, but we advocate that their use of 1080 be banned and replaced by PAPP, which is a more humane alternative. It is crucial that any programs targeting feral cats be fully justified before implementation. This must involve proving the negative impacts of feral cats on wildlife, rather than assuming this is the case based on feral cat numbers, and evaluating the impact of control programs by monitoring populations of native species.

## **(j) any other related matters.**

Sentient supports the establishment of a national cat action plan to achieve consistency in the management of domestic cat populations throughout Australia, with key goals being to reduce the number of unwanted and euthanased domestic cats and kittens. We commend the Australian Cat Action Plan (ACAP)<sup>34</sup> produced by GETTING 2 ZERO (G2Z), a national program developed and delivered by the Animal Welfare League of Queensland. This plan recommends low-cost actions including:

- Targeted cooperative desexing programs funded by local governments for owned, semi-owned and community cats for people on low incomes and/or caring for multiple cats
- Cats and kittens to be desexed and microchipped from 8 weeks of age before rehoming, sale or transfer
- Increased uptake of pre-pubertal desexing
- Greater availability of pet-friendly accommodation
- Improved rehoming of desexed cats and kittens, such as through adoption drives and expanded foster care networks
- Local governments to support owners to keep their cats contained
- Support for semi-owners to take ownership or help find owners of semi-owned cats
- Desex and adopt or return programs for colony cats in urban areas where native species are not endangered
- Promotion of cat containment measures and anti-predation strategies to keep cats and wildlife safe

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<sup>33</sup> <https://pestsmart.org.au/toolkit-resource/feral-cat-humaneness-matrix/>

<sup>34</sup> GETTING 2 ZERO (G2Z), Australian Cat Action Plan, June 2018. <https://www.g2z.org.au/national-cat-action-plan.html>